

## A 'Greater Israel' in the Making?

*Trump seems to be bent on jettisoning the “two-state solution” to the Arab–Israeli conflict.*

**T**he occupying colonial power in Palestine, the Israeli state, has been rightly condemned in the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) Resolution 2334 of 23 December 2016 for all

the measures Tel Aviv has taken to alter the “demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem.” As is well known,

the Israeli state has aided and abetted the construction and expansion of settlements, the transfer of Israeli settlers, the confiscation of Palestinian land, the demolition of Palestinian homes and the displacement of Palestinian residents. Needless to say, all these measures are in flagrant violation of international law and a number of earlier United Nations (UN) resolutions. At the heart of these violations is the Israeli state's concerted attempts to imperil the "viability of the two-State solution based on the 1967 lines." But even as the resolution reiterates the demand that "Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem," it is totally devoid of any means of enforcing what it has demanded. Indeed, UNSC Resolution 2334 (2016), like most other UN rulings, is toothless.

And yet, predictably, the Israeli government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu has been up in defiance of the resolution, resolving to move ahead with the construction of thousands of new homes in East Jerusalem and on the West Bank. What however unnerved the Israeli government was the Obama administration's instruction to its UN ambassador to *abstain* rather than veto the Security Council resolution, for successive United States (us) presidential administrations since the late 1970s had consistently backed the Israeli state by blocking such resolutions with a veto. Indeed the resolution's passage was smooth; it was by a 14–0 vote, with the us abstaining. The Israeli government was furious not only at the Obama administration, but also at the 14 yes-voter countries, severely castigating them for "ganging up" against Tel Aviv.

What emboldened Israel to behave in such an arrogant manner? The reason, of course, is the impending coming into the us presidential office of Donald Trump on 20 January. The Obama administration was ruffled. Five days after the passing of the resolution, on 28 December 2016, us Secretary of State John Kerry, in a speech on "Middle East Peace," reiterated the prevailing position on us foreign policy as regards West Asia (what the Americans call the Middle East), namely, that the two-state solution to the Arab–Israeli conflict is an "important way of advancing us interests in the region." Israeli settlements leading to a change in the demographic composition of the Palestinian

Territory would unleash a "dangerous dynamic," one which would lead to "greater conflict and instability" in West Asia where the us has "vital interests." The Obama administration and the section of the us ruling class holding on to this position, of course, want a truncated two-state solution, with a Palestinian authority minus Hamas at the head of a dependent Palestinian state having jurisdiction only in a part of the West Bank, and see this as a necessary political cover for ensuring the continued support of the Arab monarchies and military dictatorships in West Asia. Indeed, much of the more recent expansion of Israeli settlements has been in the West Bank proper.

What then of the significant change in us foreign policy with regard to West Asia that will be on the anvil with the arrival of Trump in the oval office on 20 January? Elements of this change found expression in an article by John Bolton entitled "Obama's Parting Betrayal of Israel" (*Wall Street Journal*, 26 December 2016), claiming that Obama had "stabbed Israel in the front." Bolton, a former UN ambassador now parked at the Washington-based conservative think tank, the American Enterprise Institute, and a foreign policy adviser to Trump, is confident that the two-state solution will be dumped by Trump. He urges the president elect to adopt the "three-state solution," which advocates turning over Gaza to the Egyptian military dictatorship, parts of the West Bank to the parliamentary monarchy of Jordan, and with the rest of the occupied territories remaining with Israel. What then of the Palestinians? Another mass expulsion? Trump is expected to drive home the message of a burial of the two-state solution by first moving the us embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Is some sort of "Greater Israel" in the making?

If so, then what kind of new deals and manoeuvres will Washington have to strike with the Arab monarchies and military dictatorships to retain their loyalty in the run-up to the creation of the envisaged "Greater Israel?" Frankly, we do not know. But, with an abandonment of the truncated two-state solution, will the Arab leaderships even be willing to have a new relation with Tel Aviv and cooperate with it in countering Tehran, as Washington would like? As it is, Washington's attempt at regime change in Syria has dismally failed. Clearly, an escalation of regional tensions in West Asia is on the cards.